Government prepares to auction off Imelda Marcos jewellery after Apex Court forfeits one of three seized collections in favour of government

The ‘Malacanang Collection’ includes semi-precious stones, gold tiaras and diamonds in gold bracelets

Published: February 14, 2017 16:37Barbara Mae Dacanay, Correspondent
https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/philippines/government-prepares-to-auction-off-imelda-marcos-jewellery-after-apex-court-forfeits-one-of-three-seized-collections-in-favour-of-government-1.1978400

An official holds a diamond-studded piece of jewellery seized by the government from former first lady Imelda Marcos.Image Credit: AFP

Manila: Government agencies have prepared to auction off the jewellery of former first lady Imelda Marcos after the Apex Court forfeited one of three seized collections in favour of the government, sources said.

“The government must get similar rulings from the Supreme Court on two other collections that were seized in 1986,” a source from the office of Reynaldo Munsayac, head of the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG), told *Gulf News*.

In a decision, written by Chief Justice Maria Lourdes P.A. Sereno on January 18, (but belatedly released on February 13), the Supreme Court (SC) affirmed the ruling of the Sandiganbayan anti-graft court in 2014 that the ‘Malacanang Collection’ of Marcos, estimated between $110,055 (Dh404,210) and $153,089 (Dh562,265), was ill-gotten and should be forfeited in favour of the government.

It was in response to the claim of Marcos and her daughter Irene Marcos-Araneta, that the Sandiganbayan anti-graft court ruling initially in 2009, and later in 2014, was not just.

Confiscated from the presidential palace after the former first family was ousted by a people-backed military mutiny in 1986, the ‘Malacanang Collection’ included well-set semi-precious stones made into belts, brooches, and earrings; white diamonds in gold tiaras; pink diamonds in gold bracelets; and diamond in gold buckle. The PCGG kept them in the vaults of the Central Bank of the Philippines.

Estimating that the legal income of the Marcoses from 1966 to 1986 was $304,372.43, the Apex Court said, “The assailed [complained about] partial

summary judgement dated 13 January 2014 and Resolution dated 11 June 2014 rendered by the Sandiganbayan are affirmed."

"Whenever any public officer or employee has acquired during his incumbency an amount of property which is manifestly out of proportion to his salary as such public officer or employee and to his other lawful income and the income from legitimately acquired property, said property shall be presumed prima facie to have been unlawfully acquired," the High Court argued. "Petitioners [Marcos and her daughter] failed to satisfactorily show that the properties were lawfully acquired; hence, the prima facie presumption that they were unlawfully acquired prevails," it said.

The two other seized Marcos jewelleries are called Hawaii Collection (seized by the US customs) and Roumeliotes Collection. All three seized collections were estimated earlier at $21 million

The former strongman was said to have stolen $15 to $25 billion in ill-gotten wealth, but the Philippine government failed to raise this in court and he was never convicted of plunder — there is a law that prohibits the filing of a case against a person in absence.

But the PCGG managed to recover alleged ill-gotten wealth starting 1986, because former Marcos allies negotiated to return properties and shares that they fronted for the former strongman. The Swiss government also returned to the Philippine government $625 million from foundations that were traced to the former Philippine strongman.

Marcos died while living in exile in Hawaii in 1989. Former president Corazon Aquino allowed the surviving Marcos family members to return in Manila in

1991. Many of them ran for government offices. Imelda Marcos is now a congresswoman in the House of Representatives.

Former senator Ferdinand Marcos Junior filed a complaint about election fraud — after he lost by a small margin to Vice President Leni Robredo. The case is still pending. When the younger Marcos campaigned before the May 2015 elections, he refused to apologise for alleged wrongdoings of his parents.

An employee from the Bureau of Customs shows items from the Marcos jewellery collection that was appraised at the Central Bank in Manila last week Image Credit: Reuters